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The
Ku-Klux Testimony
Relating to Alabama

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PUBLISHED IN

The Gulf States Historical Magazine

November, 1903





Class F326

Book F74

THE KU KLUX TESTIMONY RELATING TO ALABAMA.

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In 1869-70 the Radical leaders began to observe signs in the Southern States that indicated the growing strength of the Democratic party. The Fifteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution by the forced ratifications of Virginia, Texas, Mississippi and Georgia. President Grant sent in a message to Congress announcing the ratification as "the most important event that has occurred since the nation came into life." Congress responded to the hint in the message by passing the first of the Enforcement Acts. For two years this measure had been impending, and the excuse now for making it a law was that the Ku Klux organizations would prevent the blacks from voting in the fall of 1870. This act was approved on May 31, 1870; a supplementary Enforcement Act was passed on February 28, 1871; and on April 20, 1871, the last of the series, the notorious "Ku Klux" Act, was passed into law.*

The effect of these Enforcement Acts was to take over to the Central Government all the powers of the State governments relating to suffrage and elections.†

The acts were said to be for the purpose of enforcing the XIVth and XVth Amendments.

The laws were ostensibly but not really aimed at the Ku Klux movement. The Ku Klux organizations had disbanded before 1870. The South was more peaceful than it had been in 1868 and 1869, but was more Democratic. The real purpose was to prevent the newly reconstructed Southern States from being carried by the Democrats in the elections of 1870 and 1872. It was especially important that those States be held in the Republican ranks until after the presidential election in 1872. To justify this "Force" legislation, and to ob-

*Text of the Acts in McPherson, *Reconstruction*, 546-550; McPherson, *Hand-book of Politics* (1872), 3-8, 85-87.

†See Burgess, *Reconstruction and the Constitution*, 257, 258, for discussion of the Force laws.

tain material for use in the next year's campaign, Congress appointed a committee to investigate the condition of affairs in the Southern States. This committee was organized on April 20, 1871, the date of the approval of the Ku Klux Act.*

The members of the sub-committee that took testimony in Alabama were: Senators Pratt and Rice, and Messrs. Blair, Beck and Buckley, of the House. Blair and Beck, the Democratic members, were never present together. So the sub-committee consisted of three Republicans and one Democrat. C. W. Buckley was a carpet-bag Representative from Alabama, a former Bureau reverend, who worked hard to convict the white people of the State.

The sub-committee held sessions in Huntsville, October 6-14; Montgomery, October 17-20; Demopolis, October 23-28; Livingston, October 30 to November 3; and in Columbus, Miss., for West Alabama, November 11. All these places were in Black counties. Sessions were held only at easily accessible places, and where scalawag, carpet-bag and negro witnesses could easily be secured. Testimony was also taken by the committee in Washington from June to August, 1871.

It is generally believed that the examination of witnesses by the Ku Klux Committee of Congress was a very one-sided affair, and that the testimony is practically without value for the historian, on account of the immense proportion of hearsay reports and manufactured tales embraced in it. Of course there is much that is worthless because untrue, and much that may be true but cannot be regarded because of the character of the witnesses whose statements are unsupported. But, nevertheless, the 2,008 pages of testimony taken in Alabama are a mine of information concerning the social, religious, educational, political, legal, administrative, agricultural and financial conditions in Alabama from 1865 to 1871. The report itself, of 632 pages, contains much that is not in the testimony, especially as regards railroad and cotton frauds, taxation and the public debt, and much of this information can be secured nowhere else.

The minority members of the sub-committee which took testimony in Alabama, General Frank P. Blair and later Mr.

*See *Report* of the Committee, 1, 2, which is Senate *Report* No. 41, Part 1, 42d Cong., 2d Sess., or House *Report* No. 22, Part 1, 42d Cong., 2d Sess.

Beck, of New York, had summoned before the committee at Washington, and before the sub-committee in Alabama, the most prominent men of the State—men who, on account of their positions, were intimately acquainted with the condition of affairs in the State. General Blair took care that the examination covered everything that had occurred since the war. The Republican members often protested against the evidence that Blair proposed to introduce, and ruled it out. He took exceptions, and sometimes the committee at Washington admitted it; sometimes he smuggled it in any way, by means of cross questioning, or else he incorporated it into the minority report. On the other hand, the Republican members of the sub-committee seem to have felt that the object of the investigation was only to get a lot of campaign stories for the use of the Radical party in the coming elections. They summoned a sorry class of witnesses, a large proportion of whom were ignorant negroes who could only tell what they had heard or had feared. The best of the Radicals were not summoned unless by the Democrats. In several instances the Democrats caused to be summoned the prominent scalawags and carpet-baggers, who usually gave testimony damaging to the Radical cause.

An examination of the testimony shows that sixty-four Democrats and Conservatives were called before the committee and sub-committee. Of these, fifty-seven were Southern men, five were Northern men residing in the State, and two were negroes. The Democrats testified at great length, often twenty to fifty pages. Blair and Beck tried to bring out everything concerning the character of carpet-bag rule.*

Thirty-four scalawags, fifteen carpet-baggers and forty-one negro Radicals came before the committee and sub-committee. Some of these were summoned by Blair or Beck, and a number of them disappointed the Republican members of

* Some of the Conservatives who testified were: General Cullen A. Battle, R. H. Abercrombie, General James H. Clanton, P. M. Dox, Governor Robert B. Lindsay, Reuben Chapman, Thomas Cobbs, Daniel Coleman, Jefferson M. Falkner, William H. Forney, William M. Lowe, William Richardson, Francis S. Lyon, William S. Mudd, General Edmund W. Pettus, Turner Reavis, James L. Pugh, P. T. Sayre, R. W. Walker—all prominent men of the highest character.

the committee by giving good Democratic testimony.* The Radicals could only repeat, with variations, the story of the Eutaw riot, the Patona affair, the Huntsville parade, etc. Of the prominent carpet-baggers and scalawags whose testimony was anti-Democratic, most were men of unsavory character.†

The testimony of the higher Federal officials was mostly in favor of the Democratic contention.‡

The negro testimony, however worthless it may appear at first sight, becomes as clear as day to one who, knowing the negro mind, remembers the influences then operating upon it. From this class of testimony one gets valuable hints and suggestions. The character of the white scalawag and carpet-bag testimony is more complex, but if one has the history of the witness, the testimony usually becomes clear. In many instances the testimony gives a short history of the witness.

The material collected by the Ku Klux Committee and other committees that investigated affairs in the South after the war, can be used with profit only by one who will go to the biographical books and learn the social and political history of each person who testified. When the personal history of the important witness is known, many things become plain. Unless this is known, one cannot safely accept or reject any specific testimony. To one who works in Alabama reconstruction, Brewer's *Alabama*, Garrett's *Reminiscences*, the *Memorial Record*, old newspaper files and the memories of old citizens are indispensable.

There is in the first volume of the Alabama Testimony a delightfully partisan index of seventy-five pages. In it the summary of Democratic testimony shows up almost as Radical as the worst on the other side. It is meant only to bring out the violence in the testimony. According to it, one would

* Some of those who gave, willingly or unwillingly, Democratic testimony: W. T. Blackford (s.), Judge Busted (c.), General Cranford, Nich. Davis (s.), L. W. Day (c.), Samuel A. Hale (c.), (brother of John P. Hale, of New Hampshire), J. H. Speed (s.), United States Senator Willard Warner (c.), N. L. Whitfield (s.)
(c.)—Carpet-bagger. (s.)—Scalawag.

† Charles Hays (s.), W. B. Jones (s.), S. F. Rice (s.), John A. Minnis (s.), Parson Lakin (s.), B. W. Norris (s.), L. E. Parsons (s.), E. W. Peck (s.), and L. R. Smith (c.). The three last were the most respectable of the lot, but were disappointed politicians.

‡ Day, Busted, VanValkenburg, General Cranford, etc.

think all those killed or mistreated were Radicals. The same man frequently figures in three situations, as shot, outraged and killed. General Clanton's testimony of thirty pages gets a summary of four inches, which tells nothing; that of Wager, a Bureau agent, gets as much as twelve pages, which tell something; and that of Minnis, a scalawag, twice as much.

There is very little to be found in the testimony that relates directly to the Ku Klux Klan and similar organizations. Had the sessions of the sub-committee been held in the white counties of North and Southwest Alabama, where the Klans had flourished, probably they might have found out something about the organization. But the minority members were determined to expose the actual condition of affairs in the State from 1865 to 1871. No matter how much the Radicals might discover concerning unlawful organizations, the Democrats stood ready with an immense deal of facts concerning Radical misgovernment to show cause why such organizations should arise. Consequently the three volumes of testimony relating to Alabama are by no means pro-Radical except in the attitude of the majority of the examiners.*

Below is given a table of alleged Ku Klux outrages, compiled from the testimony taken. The Ku Klux report classifies all violence under the four heads: Killing, Shooting, Outrage, Whipping. The same case frequently figures in two or more classes. Practically every case of violence, whether political or not, is brought into the testimony. The period covered is from 1865 to 1871. Radical outrages as well as Democratic are listed in the report as Ku Klux outrages. In a number of cases Radical outrages are made to appear as Democratic. Many of the cases are simply hearsay. It is not likely that many instances of outrage escaped notice; for every case of actual outrage was proven by many witnesses. Every violent death of man, woman or child, white or black, Democratic or Radical, occurring between 1865 and 1871 appears in the list as a Ku Klux outrage. Evidently careful search had been made, and the witnesses had informed themselves about every actual deed of violence. There were sixty.

* Senate *Report*, No. 48, Parts 8, 9 and 10, or House *Report*, No. 22, Parts 8, 9 and 10, contains the Alabama Testimony.

four counties in the state and in only twenty-nine of them were there alleged instances of Ku Klux outrage:

TABLE OF ALLEGED OUTRAGES COMPILED FROM THE KU KLUX TESTIMONY.

COUNTY.					COUNTIES.						
	Killings.	Outrages.	Shootings.	Whippings.		Total.	Killings.	Outrages.	Shootings.	Whippings.	Total.
Autauga -----	1				1	Limestone, k -----	7	1		1	9
Blount, k -----	2	2		6	11	Macon, x -----	1	4	1	1	7
Calhoun -----	6	1	1	1	9	Madison, x -----	6	19	5	19	49
Chambers, k -----	1		1		2	Marshall, k -----	1		1	1	3
Cherokee, k -----		2		1	3	Marengo, x -----	1	6		4	11
Choctaw, x -----	11	1	3		15	Montgomery, x -----		1			1
Coosa -----			1	12	13	Morgan, k -----	4	2	1	2	10
Colbert, k -----	1	1		1	3	Perry, x -----	2		2	2	6
Dallas, x -----	1	1			2	Pickens, x -----				9	9
Fayette, k -----	1			3	4	Sumter, x -----	21	4	9	4	38
Greene, x -----	11	4	1	3	19	St. Clair -----	1	1	1		3
Hale, x -----	1	3	2	1	7	Tallapoosa, k -----				1	1
Jackson -----	4	2	2	2	10	Tuscaloosa, k -----	8				8
Lauderdale -----				1	1	Walker, k -----				1	1
Lawrence, k -----	2				2						

X—Black Counties and K—White Counties where Ku Klux Klans operated.

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